

## **WHO CAN I ASK FOR HELP? (Coalition Building/Maintenance)**

The support of organizations in your community will increase the likelihood that your program will be successful. You could solicit the help of experts in fields such as transportation, environment, public relations, and market research. In addition, consider seeking the support of community members who have established networks that could help relay your messages to your target audience(s). These contacts must be made early in your program B remember you are competing with many other community issues. Enlisting the support of these community allies can help extend the reach, impact, and credibility of your program and messages.

One way to gain the support and strength of allies is to create a community coalition. Increasingly, public education initiatives are using coalitions to mobilize public involvement at the community, state, regional, and national levels to address a myriad of issues, such as smoking cessation, drug abuse, education, politics, cancer, violence prevention, mental health, and safety. A coalition is simply an alliance of various parties, unified for one purpose. Local coalitions can be very effective and powerful. For example, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) has been instrumental in changing the public=s attitude, and thereby, laws on drinking and driving. You could create a coalition that focuses only on your current program goals and objectives, or you may seek to build a coalition that will be involved in this initiative as well as future transportation/air quality programs in your community.

### **Benefits to Forming a Coalition**

There are many advantages to bringing together a broad spectrum of organizations to focus on specific issues. Collaboration can be an effective and rewarding method of identifying and pursuing common objectives and strategies, with both short- and long-term benefits. Advantages for building a coalition include the following:

- \$ effective and efficient delivery of messages and programs to increase public knowledge of the issues and available resources;
- \$ increased communications and coordination among similar and potentially opposing organizations, reducing antagonism and duplication of efforts;
- \$ creation of a network of community leaders to share limited human, financial, and other resources;
- \$ development of widespread public support for issues, actions, or needs;
- \$ development of innovative, multi-level solutions to complex problems;
- \$ mobilization of organizations to achieve joint actions, greater than any single organization could achieve independently; and
- \$ improved public image of the program and all organizations involved.

## Challenges to Forming a Coalition

Along with the many advantages of coalitions, there are several challenges, which you will best be able to meet if you anticipate them. Some of these difficulties may include:

- \$ maintaining group cohesion and building relationships that supersede personal and organizational conflicts, including turbulent historical relationships, mistrust, and conflicting points of view;
- \$ focusing organizations on common, as opposed to controversial, issues;
- \$ encouraging collaboration among groups that desire to maintain their own identity;
- \$ minimizing name-only involvement resulting from lack of commitment, time, or resources for participation;
- \$ providing a range of roles so that organizations can participate on a level commensurate with their resources and goals;
- \$ identifying appropriate individuals who also have the authority to make a commitment or decision on behalf of their organization; and
- \$ sustaining the group, especially during crisis situations.

## Steps to Creating and Working with a Community Coalition

### *Recruiting Coalition Members*

1. Determine your needs and who or what organizations could best fulfill them. Have a clear vision of what you want them to contribute and select partners who meet those qualifications, such as:
  - \$ genuine interest in and commitment to the issue;
  - \$ established influence with the target audience(s);
  - \$ positive reputation in the community;
  - \$ ability to commit resources (time, staff, funds, etc.); or
  - \$ track record of teaming with community agencies.
2. Potential coalition members should be those individuals and organizations who have a stake or interest in reducing traffic congestion and air pollution. This list includes those who are traditionally involved (e.g., state and local government officials, transportation industry representatives, environmental advocacy groups, public health professionals, leaders of influential community groups), as well as those who are indirectly involved (e.g., businesses, consumer groups, media, civic organizations, health care providers). See the list at the end of this section for categories of prospective coalition participants.

A key to sustaining success is involving a diverse range of partners: in diversity there is strength. As long as the goal and agenda are set and agreed to by potential members, there should be no problem involving organizations that have varying agendas. The messages of the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* initiative have been proven to be able

to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders.

3. Research the individuals or groups you want to recruit so you can relate to their interests and goals when you contact them. It is also important to determine an organization's potential to be controversial, its credibility, and its standing in its field.
4. Draft a letter to potential coalition members inviting them to participate in an initial organizing meeting. Follow up by phone to discuss coalition membership and answer any questions or concerns they may have. In recruiting participants, peer-to-peer contacts are valuable. If you want to attract CEOs or chairpersons, a high-level person or chair of your organization should be involved in the recruitment process.
5. When any coalition member speaks or meets with a potential member, he or she should provide a brief history of the coalition and the program, summarize the purpose of the coalition, and clearly explain what is expected from the potential member to support the initiative, why they have a stake in supporting it, and what benefits they will experience by getting involved. The *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* marketing kit includes a variety of useful materials, such as an overview of the initiative, a summary of the research behind the initiative, and promotional flyers for each of the core messages, which appeal to specific, different potential members.

### ***Conducting Your First Coalition Meeting***

Once you have recruited the key members of your coalition, prepare an agenda and gather everyone together for the introductory meeting. At this meeting, review the program goals and objectives, the target audience, key messages, and the timeline. Show the group the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* print and broadcast ads, which are provided in this toolkit. Depending on the size of your coalition, consider dividing the participants into committees based on their talents and desires, and select committee heads. You also will need to determine a schedule for future coalition and committee meetings, e.g., holding committee meetings once a week and overall coalition meetings once a month during ozone season, and as needed during the rest of the year for planning and preparation of materials and activities. Keep in mind that conflicts with members' schedules will arise, because most of them have full-time jobs, and establish a system for reporting to members who miss a meeting or event.

You also could use this first meeting as a brainstorming session. Review the program activities you have planned and ask for ideas. For example, one of your coalition members may have key connections or ideas about how to work with other organizations or the media to help meet the program's objectives.

## ***Establishing Group Processes***

Forming a coalition requires teamwork, perseverance, cooperation, imagination, and commitment. Once the coalition has been established and is ready to begin work, it is important to agree upon group processes, especially communications. Each coalition develops its own pattern of interaction, which goes through various phases as the members learn to trust one another. Successful coalitions depend on an efficient system for communications and coordination. Make sure, for example, to establish agreement among the participants on next steps to take as a result of each meeting. All coalition members should be apprised of upcoming events, programs, and discussions. Following meetings, send out a letter of appreciation along with a summary of the information discussed and the next steps.

## **Ways Coalition Members Can Help the Program**

A diverse group of coalition members can support your program in a wide variety of ways, such as:

***Urging the media to use broadcast and print advertisements as PSAs.*** A community coalition has great influence, e.g., TV and radio stations give greater consideration to airing the *It All Adds Up* ads for free if they receive calls and letters from public officials, industry experts, business leaders, and consumer groups all endorsing the ads. Also, consider recruiting newspaper editors and radio and television station representatives as members of your coalition, enabling you to have more direct access to and support from the media.

***Seeking support of local decision makers/opinion leaders.*** Some of your coalition members may have influence with your town, city, or state government officials. You may have recruited such officials as members of your coalition. Look to these members and their contacts to gain support for your program. In the same way that coalition members can promote your program to TV and radio stations, they also can have a powerful influence on elected officials and their resources to extend the reach of your program messages.

***Developing network and resource linkages.*** Leverage your coalition members' skills, talents, and links to various resources, in order to disseminate your messages. If one member has expertise in the use of the Internet, for example, he/she could help you use this resource to gather research or to spread program messages by posting information on his/her organization's World Wide Web site.

***Recruiting others.*** To expand your community support and message dissemination, encourage your members to recruit others who have missions similar to their own. People are more willing to join a cause when invited by colleagues and friends whose advice they trust. But don't give up if your membership seems small at first. Some people are more willing to join an effort after it demonstrates progress and success.

***Helping to conduct research.*** Consider recruiting members with experience in market research and evaluation. Their skills will be valuable in assessing the current knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of your target audience(s), as well as the overall effectiveness of your initiative in

meeting its objectives.

***Comparing and contrasting past or similar programs.*** Your coalition members may already have been involved in a similar program and can bring a contrasting viewpoint, fresh ideas, or the benefit of lessons learned from previous activities.

***Writing guest opinion columns.*** Coalition members who are respected community leaders may be willing to byline a letter to the editor or a guest opinion column in your local newspaper. This letter or column offers a citizen=s viewpoint of the issue and can promote the program messages. (See Effective Media Relations for examples.)

***Disseminating program materials.*** Some coalition members may want to serve as “dissemination partners” by using their organization=s distribution networks to deliver materials and messages.

***Conducting workplace outreach.*** If there are business leaders on your coalition, they may be willing to distribute program messages to their employees through internal vehicles such as an interoffice newsletter or bulletin boards in common areas.

## **Sustaining Your Coalition**

There are many challenges to maintaining the vitality of a coalition. Some general tips include:

- § Address coalition difficulties as they occur. Don=t let problems fester. If, for example, there is a conflict between two members, bring them together and work out a solution.
- § Share the power and leadership responsibilities among participants. Avoid cliques and “in groups.” Make a conscious effort to keep *all* members active and involved.
- § Recruit and involve new members. Organizations benefit from new blood, diversity, and fresh points-of-view. A mix of new members with seasoned members provides a coalition with a winning combination of enthusiasm, energy, and experience.
- § Maintain open communications among members. Make every effort to encourage active participation and communications.
- § Support the lead agency and allocate resources so that no one group or person reaches the burnout point. For the coalition to be effective in reaching its goals, it will need to operate over a significant period of time. Burn out will occur unless steps are taken to revitalize the group and to assure that no one person is bearing undue responsibility.
- § Celebrate and share successes to maintain the group’s morale. Recognize short-term gains and achievements. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, such as sending thank you letters; recognizing members with awards; citations and committee chair appointments; and acknowledging their work in your newsletter and at meetings.

- § Stay in touch with your partners to gauge the progress of assigned activities, provide any needed support, and make adjustments and improvements to their roles as needed.
- § Evaluate your progress. Evaluations not only are a valuable means of assessing progress, but also are helpful to members in reporting to their own organizations about the success of the coalition.

### **Summary**

In summary, there are several key elements to establishing and maintaining a successful coalition, which are:

***Common Goals*** B The need or desired change must be understood and agreed upon by all involved.

***Communications*** B Use language that all participants can understand. Avoid professional or industry jargon.

***Each Member is Important to the Coalition*** B Each participant should perceive him/herself as an important part of the whole, contributing to its success.

***Opportunity to Participate*** B Each member should have input into the development of your goals, methods, and decisions.

***Ownership*** B Members feel responsible for an activity or product results from participating in the coalition decision-making process; and provides an opportunity for individual accomplishments.

***Efficient, Effective Meetings*** B Keep coalition meetings moving toward the agreed-upon goals, objectives, and tactics. Each meeting should make progress on implementing the initiative, which participants can recognize by the end of the meeting.

***Process and Procedures*** B Establish a format for conducting meetings and decision-making early in the development of the coalition.

***Shared or Situational Leadership*** B It is important that several members of the coalition share leadership responsibilities.

***Member Recognition*** - To keep your coalition members involved and enthusiastic about the initiative, strive to recognize their work whenever possible.

## POTENTIAL COALITION PARTICIPANTS

### State and Local Government

Governors  
State Regulatory Commissions  
State Departments of Transportation  
State Departments of Health  
County and City Health Officials  
State Departments of Education  
State Departments of Motor Vehicles  
State and Local Legislators  
City Council Members  
Mayors  
Metropolitan Planning Organizations  
Local and Regional Transportation Authorities  
State Highway and Transportation Officials

### Transportation Industry

Automobile Manufacturers  
Local Transit Operators  
Trucking Companies  
Freight Companies  
Transportation Companies

### Auto Interest Groups

Motor Vehicle Administrators  
Automobile Manufacturers  
Vehicle Service Stations  
Automotive Dealers  
Vehicle Inspection Stations

### Fuel & Utility Industry

Gasoline Stations  
Fuel and Oil Companies  
Local Utility Companies

### Environmental/Public Health Groups

State Medical Associations  
Local Air Pollution Control Officials  
State Air Quality Management Officials  
State and Territorial Air Pollution Program  
Administrators  
Public Health Officials  
Health Professionals

### Businesses

City and State Chambers of Commerce  
Major Local Companies

### Driving Public

State Driver Education Association  
State and Local Automobile Associations  
State and Local Highway Safety Groups

### Advertising/Public Relations

Advertising Agencies  
Public Relations Agencies  
Advertising/Public Relations Clubs  
Market Research Firms

### Civic/Service Organizations

Jaycees  
Rotary Club  
Lions Club  
Kiwanis  
Neighborhood Associations  
Fraternities and Sororities  
Faith-based Organizations

### Youth Groups

Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts  
4-H  
Student Councils

### Media

Local News Wire Services  
Newspapers  
Newsletters  
Magazines  
Radio Stations  
Television Stations  
Cable Stations  
High School and College newspapers

### Educational Groups

Teacher Unions  
Parent-Teacher Associations